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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000289

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV RS AJ

SUBJECT: GOR CONCERNED AZERBAIJAN WILL RAISE

NAGORNO-KARABAKH IN UN

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Minsk Group Co-Chair Yuri Merzlyakov told us February 6 the GOR had learned Azerbaijan was planning to make Nagorno-Karabakh an agenda item for the March UNGA session on protracted conflicts in the GUAM area, which ran the risk of halting the conflict resolution process. If this did not happen, Merzlyakov suggested inviting Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents Sargsian and Aliyev to meet again in April, and possibly again at the June Economic Forum in St. Petersburg. He underscored the importance of the Presidents' meetings, as they were "freer" in addressing issues than their "maximalist" Foreign Ministers. Merzlyakov proposed making the next Co-Chair visit to the region from February 26 to March 2, as Armenia's Foreign Minister Nalbandian would be out of the country until March 1. End Summary.

Plans to raise Nagorno-Karabakh in the UN

¶2. (C) Russian Ambassador-at-large and Minsk Group Co-Chair Yuri Merzlyakov told us February 6 that the GOR had just learned Azerbaijan was planning to make Nagorno-Karabakh an agenda item for the March UNGA session on protracted conflicts in the GUAM area. Merzlyakov feared Armenia would retaliate by demanding the involvement of representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh in the session, which in turn would likely grind the conflict resolution process to a standstill.

Next steps

¶3. (C) Barring any such negative development, Merzlyakov suggested inviting Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents Sargsian and Aliyev to meet again in April, while there was a possibility for another meeting of the leaders at the St Petersburg Economic Forum in June. With a laugh, Merzlyakov dismissed the notion that Medvedev would again invite the leaders, as he had November 2, 2008, presumably remembering how President Medvedev had closed the Minsk Group Co-Chairs out of that event. On a more serious note, Merzlyakov warned that the rumored Azerbaijani action in the UN would likely spell the end of any meetings between the two presidents.

¶4. (C) Underscoring the importance of such presidential meetings, Merzlyakov recalled that Sargsian and Aliyev's January 28 meeting in Zurich had brought progress on the first of the Minsk Group's goals, finding a common understanding on the Madrid Principles. Merzlyakov lamented the presidents moved no closer on the Minsk Group's other goal, rapprochement over the four outstanding issues: the Lachin corridor, referendum, future status of Nagorno-Karabakh, and refugee return. The Minsk Group Co-Chairs would try to raise these issues during their next visit to the region. Merzlyakov observed that the Foreign

Ministers generally did not advance the issues, instead preferring to stake out "maximalist" claims on territorial integrity (Azerbaijan) or the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia). The Presidents were "freer" in their approach to the issues, making their meetings so crucial.

¶ 15. (C) Regarding plans for the next trip of Minsk Group Co-Chairs to the region, Merzlyakov said that Armenia's Foreign Minister Nalbandian would be out of the country until March 1, so he intended to propose to his Co-Chair colleagues visiting Baku February 26-27, then transit Yerevan to Stepankert February 27-28, followed by a visit to Yerevan March 1-2.

CSTO, EU, Turkey

¶ 16. (C) Merzlyakov reiterated that the Minsk Group remained the only path for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He rejected any thought of linking the plans for a CSTO rapid reaction force to the resolution of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, and stated that the CSTO had no bearing on the Minsk Group's standing. With a grin, Merzlyakov suggested Azerbaijan should be happy if CSTO partner Armenia were to give up some of its forces for use in the rapid reaction force. Statements such as EU Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's offer for the EU to help should be seen as a confirmation of EU's special envoy to the South Caucasus Peter Semneby's involvement, as well as a reference to the EU's Eastern Partnership plans. Turkey's

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Stability and Cooperation Platform was only meant to improve security in the region, not supplant the Minsk Group Process, Merzlyakov said. Turkish commitments to respecting the territorial integrity of the conflict did not mean Turkey would take any action if Azerbaijan's integrity was threatened -- Merzlyakov pointed out that Turkey had never made any mention of using force.

BEYRLE